



# GAY & GOD

*Loving Everyone God Made  
and Everything God Wrote*

WITH STUDY GUIDE

**Mike Novotny**

*Some names have been changed in this book to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The email said it all: “Hey, Pastor . . . When I was 14, I came out as a lesbian. Today I have an amazing marriage and want to start a family. I want my children to grow up in the church and hear God’s Word. I would like to know if my wife and I and my future children are welcome [at your church].”

This email and this woman are why I needed to write about this topic and why you and I need to really take a look at it. Because this isn’t just wedding cakes and county clerks, Jason Collins and Caitlin Jenner. No, it’s about people. People like the writer of this email. People God loves. It’s about the young gay man who loves to go to church—is he welcome? It’s about the flesh-and-blood brother of one of our brothers in the faith—should we celebrate his coming out or call it sin? It’s about the lesbians who want to adopt—what will this book say about their love? LGBTQ+ people aren’t “out there.” They’re here. They’re us. They’re the ones we love.

But the answer to this email is not so simple. Not in this divided-down-the-aisle debate. Is she welcome at church?

“Well, everybody can come.”

“But you have to judge her sin, right?”

“But how can it be sin if God made her gay?”

“God didn’t make her gay. She chose it.”

“No, she didn’t. And didn’t Jesus say, ‘Don’t judge!’?”

“But Jesus also said, ‘Repent!’”

“But John 3 says God loves the world.”

“But Leviticus 18 says it’s an abomination.”

“But Leviticus also says you can’t eat shrimp!”

“You’re ignoring the passages.”

“You’re ignoring the people.”

With reasons like this on both sides of the debate, I think God feels like Stretch Armstrong, pulled to opposite extremes.

Here we are in the middle of the debate, the one about being gay and what God thinks about it. For the next five chapters, that's what we're going to do. But before we open up a Bible and dig deeper, I need to tell you four things:

First, I'm not winging this. I'm not copying and pasting a sermon I heard about Sodom when I was a kid. No, I've poured over the passages more than anything I've ever written or preached. I've read eight books on this subject written by straight conservatives, gay conservatives, gay liberals, and former liberal lesbians who are now straight conservatives. I have interviewed six pastors, five of which believe homosexuality is not a sin. I have dialogued with members of Rainbow Over Wisconsin and Positive Voice, pro-LGBTQ+ organizations. All were incredibly gracious to a total stranger, and I want to portray their beliefs in an equally gracious way.

*Second, you have to read this whole book.* To read one chapter would not be fair to you, to me, or to God. So please give this topic the priority it desperately needs in your heart because God needs you to love his people and his passages more deeply than you ever have before.

Third, in full disclosure, in 1999 in Waunakee, Wisconsin, I kissed a girl. It was my first kiss. The only woman I've kissed beside my wife. A month later, she came out as a lesbian. I've kissed two girls. One married me. The other married a woman. I don't know what to make of that, but I thought you should know.

Finally, *I know this matters.* Remember that email? Her email won't let me forget how much this matters. To tell a woman in love that God doesn't like her love is no small thing, and to tell billions of Christians over the past two thousand years that they were wrong about God is no small thing. This is about God and about people, and there's nothing more important than God and his people. Agreed?

## DIFFERENT DOESN'T DETER LOVE

Let's talk about love. Jesus once said, "Everyone will know you are Christians if you . . . love one another." That's why the book *unChristian* unsettles me. It's the published results of a survey done of thousands of 16- to 29-year-old non-Christians. When asked what phrases describe present-day Christianity, 75% said, "too involved in politics," 85% "hypocritical," 87% "judgmental," and—the number-one answer—91% agreed "anti-homosexual." The authors conclude, "The primary reason outsiders feel hostile towards Christians . . . is not because of any specific theological perspective [including sexuality], [but] our 'swagger.' . . . They say their aggression simply matches the oversized opinions and egos of Christians. . . . We have become famous for what we oppose, rather than who we are for."<sup>1</sup> One gay pastor whom I met said the same thing, "Mike, for most gay people, the church is public enemy #1."

That's why we need to start with an old, old story about love, a story about a very religious man who loved people and loved these passages, or so he thought.

Check out Luke 10 with me: **"On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'"** (verse 25). The person asking here is an "expert in the law," a Bible passage protector, a guy who thought about God all day long. He wants eternal life. He wants to be good enough to go to a better place and be with a perfect God. So, he asks, "Jesus, what do I do?" **"What is written in the Law?"** [Jesus] **replied. 'How do you read it?'** He answered, **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind";** and, **"Love your neighbor as yourself."** **'You have answered correctly,'** Jesus **replied. 'Do this and you will live'"** (verses 26–28). The expert recites a passage from Deuteronomy: "Love God with everything you are" and a passage from Leviticus: "Love them like you love yourself." Bingo! Jesus smiles: "Keep loving God like that and people like that and you will live forever."

The expert in the law nods, but then he pauses because his conscience has a question: **"But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"** (verse 29). Don't call this guy a weasel just yet, because he's thinking

of the passage. The passage he quoted says this: **“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself”** (Leviticus 19:18). Among *your* people. The Jewish people. Most Jews saw a loophole in the love passage. They quoted those words—*among your people*—so many times they believed they didn’t have to love other people. Gentiles, non-Jewish people? Oh no. Gentiles were different, unclean, impure. Or Samaritans? Israel’s neighbors to the west were different ethnically, morally, and sexually. They were different. John 4:9 actually admits, **“Jews do not associate with Samaritans.”** Why not? Because they were different, and the passage says, “Love your people.” People like me. Right, Jesus?

**“In reply Jesus said: ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead’”** (Luke 10:30). A guy gets jumped. He’s outnumbered and alone, bullied and beaten, abused and embarrassed. But thankfully—whew!—thankfully, two God-fearing men are on their way, men who love the passages about loving people. A priest, a full-time church worker, is coming. And a Levite, an assistant to the priests, is right behind him. Help is on the way! **“A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side”** (verses 31,32). They both passed by. Why? Was it because the man was different? Dirty to their clean? Naked to their clothed? Dangerous to their safety? We don’t know why they didn’t love him, but we know they didn’t.

**“But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have’”** (verses 33-35). The Samaritan saw him, and yeah, the beaten man was different. But different didn’t deter the Samaritan. He took pity on the man. He went to him. He helped him. He interrupted his schedule for him. He spent money on him. He went over and above for him. The man on the side of the

road was different, but that didn't deter the Samaritan's love. That's why this was a good Samaritan.

So Jesus asks, **“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”** The expert in the law replied, **‘The one who had mercy on him.’** Jesus told him, **‘Go and do likewise’**” (verses 36,37). How do you get eternal life? You love God, and you love people. Which people? All people. In other words, if you want life with God, don't let different deter your love.

Do you love your neighbors? All of them? That question makes me think about my first year at seminary. My unofficial job at the seminary was to make people laugh. Three buddies and I would make up songs and skits and entertain the students at lunch. One day I wrote a song that took a shot at another seminary student's sexual orientation. I can still remember it. I expected the laugh that edgy humor sometimes gets. But the guys didn't laugh; they hissed. When the song was done, the classmate left with tears in his eyes.

It wasn't the first sin. My school years were filled with gay jokes; limp-wristed, lisping impressions of gay men; foul uses of *fag* and *dyke* and “that's gay.” I mocked and joked and stood around while others did the same. I was the expert in the law. I read my Bible every night, and I wore a WWJD bracelet for my senior pictures. I wonder if I wore it when others needed help and I passed by on the other side? Oh, I loved *some* people, “my people,” but not all people, not different people.

And you? Are you like me, like the priest in Jesus' story, who does nothing when others are shaming a girl because she might not like boys? Are you like me, like the Levite in Jesus' story, who just passes by when transgender kids are hurting because you don't want to get your holy hands dirty? Are you like me, like the robbers in Jesus' story, who strip gay men of their joy and rob them of their dignity when you look at them with disgust? Are you homophobic? Do you feel something around LGBTQ+ people that you don't feel around other people? Do you display those nonverbals that make it clear love is not on your mind? Do you want to see gay athletes fail and gay marriages crash just to prove that “your people” are right?

A colleague of mine was a passionate supporter of reaching out to the Muslim community. Despite all the differences, he and



his wife loved Muslims. But then their daughter came out as a lesbian, and his wife hated it. She hated the homosexual agenda and the gay rights movement. She hated gay people. Until one day, the pastor said to his wife, “How can you show so much love to Muslims and have so much hate toward homosexuals?”

You see, Christian people have a problem. Sometimes those of us who claim to love a passage the most love people the least. That means we don’t really love the *passages* at all. We loved our version of the passage, the version that allowed us to be comfortable, to be right, to be bigots.

But, according to the Law (as mentioned in Luke 10:26–28), if you don’t love, you don’t have life. If you don’t love your different neighbors, you can’t inherit eternal life. If you’re a conservative Christian and you haven’t loved lesbians, the passage says you can’t have life. If you’re a lesbian and you haven’t loved conservative Christians, the passage says you can’t have life. People who pick and choose their neighbors can’t be neighbors with God.

But Jesus’ biggest reason for telling this story was not to make sure we loved more; that was a point, but not *the* point. The point was to strip all of us of the belief that we are good enough. The point was to help even experts see no one has actually loved God or neighbor that much, not all the time. The point was to turn us into the wounded man, half-dead, and then tell us this: Jesus is *the* Good Samaritan.

We were dying. Spiritually, our sin mugged us and stripped us of eternal life. We couldn’t get down the road toward God. The legs of our love were broken, our patience was punctured, our compassion infected. Empty religion came walking by and kept its distance. We weren’t good enough for the rule-keeping, sexually pure club for saints. But then Jesus came, and he was different. He is the Son of God; we are the sons and daughters of men. He is impartial; we are picky. He is spotless; we are sinners. He is whole and holy; we are broken. But the difference didn’t deter him at all. The Son of God came to sinful men . . . before we were better . . . before we repented right or believed right or acted right . . . before our relationships were biblical or our love corrected. God demonstrates his love for us like this: While we were still sinners, Jesus came down the road. And he saw us. He saw you. And he had pity. Compassion. He went to us, and he fixed us. He healed our wounds. It would cost him more

than a few silver coins. It cost him his life. He would get jumped, abused, embarrassed, stripped, and killed on a cross. Why? So that *by his wounds we could be healed*.

The expert in the law thought he was good and wanted advice on how to be better. Jesus said, “You’re bad, but a good God didn’t let different deter his love!”

*That* is what changes us. It’s called the gospel, the good news of God’s love for bad people. The gospel compels us to stop picking and choosing and start loving whomever, wherever, whenever. Despite her partner. Despite his politics. Despite the differences. The gospel, the good news of God’s love for the different, is what will turn your street, your work, your school, your church into a “gayborhood.” Know what that is? A gayborhood is a neighborhood where gay people are loved. Wikipedia calls it an “oasis” in an otherwise hostile environment. Shouldn’t our Christian churches be oases like that? Shouldn’t they be known for love and not for hypocrisy and politics? Churches where the unchurched say, “I don’t know about everything they stand for, but I know they stand for love.”

What will that look like this week? The theologian Martin Luther said Christians should love God so much they befriend their neighbor in every bodily need. So befriend a bisexual. And if there’s a bully’s fist and a bisexual’s cheek at your school, place your face in between the two. Luther also said Christians should love God so much they defend their neighbor. So, if your church friends are chuckling at the transgender kid, pack up your PB&J and eat lunch with the one who needs defending. If your girlfriends are giggling about him being gay, rain on that hate parade. When partners move into the next apartment, be the first neighbor to love them. When a gay man starts at the company, be the first coworker to include him. When your sister comes out, be the first family member to call her, not to fix or change her or share every passage about sexuality but to care for her and love her. If you’ve sinned, apologize to those you’ve excluded.

Oh, I know! I haven’t written a word about whether God is okay with being gay. I haven’t written about the morality of sexuality, about faith and repentance and same-sex attraction. That’s why you need to keep reading. But this much is indisputable. No matter what you think, Jesus is telling you to love.

Love like Ed Dobson. Ed was a pastor who believed the pas-

sages that called homosexuality a sin. Which is why some were surprised when the host of a gay radio talk show invited him in as a guest. The host said, “Our guest does not believe what we believe on issues of sexuality. . . . While his congregation disagrees with us, . . . they love people.” Some in Pastor Dobson’s church feared the church would be overrun by homosexuals. Dobson replied, “Terrific. They can take their place in the pews right next to the liars, gossips, materialists, and all the rest of us.” Then he added, “When I die, if someone stands up and says, ‘Ed Dobson loved homosexuals,’ then I will have accomplished something in my life.”<sup>2</sup>

I’m not sure what you believe about the morality of sexuality, but I am sure of this: Our Good Samaritan, Jesus, loved us despite our differences. Now he sends us down the road looking for people who are different, because different will not deter our love.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In three minutes, list the various views on homosexuality that fill our pews at the average American church.
2. Evaluate: Christians are the most loving people in our community.
3. Read John 10:25-37. Have you ever thought of Jesus as the Good Samaritan? What did he have to go through to show his love for you?
4. Read 1 John 4:9-11. How do John’s words support (or add to) the message from this chapter?
5. Agree/Disagree: Most Christians hide behind Bible passages to excuse their homophobic hearts.
6. Consider how you’ve talked about or treated LGBTQ+ people in the past. What do you wish you could’ve done differently so your love would’ve looked more like Jesus’ love for you?
7. Name one or two LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-gender) people you know. List one or two things you could do this week to let them know you love them.
8. Why is Romans 5:8 a key passage to apply, first to ourselves and then to the LGBTQ+ people in our lives?

## L(OVE) G(OSPEL) B(IBLE) T(RUST)

“But what do you think?” the young gay man asked me. “Do you think it’s a sin?”

No matter how much you love LGBTQ+ people, eventually that question will come up. Is God okay with being gay? Try that as the ice breaker at your next holiday gathering! It’s a dangerous question, isn’t it? Some people don’t care if God’s okay with it because they’re not. To them, being gay is gross, disgusting, unnatural. While I wish I could change their minds, I have to admit this chapter isn’t really for them. Other people don’t care if God’s okay with it because they’re okay with it. To them, embracing your sexual orientation is beautiful and natural and anyone who quotes a passage and says otherwise is intolerant and abusive. While I wish I could change their minds too, I have to admit this chapter isn’t really for them either.

No, this chapter is for those who do care. They care about the passages because they care about God. They love Jesus, and they trust what he says, no matter what. In this chapter I want to answer this question: Is God okay with same-sex attraction? I want to answer it because I know there are people who’ll read this book who feel same-sex attraction and don’t know what to do. Does God want them to embrace those desires or deny them? Can they talk about those desires and be loved, or should they hide them? Their consciences tell them, “This is wrong!” But are their consciences right?

I don’t want to share what I think, what the church used to teach, or what the latest survey of millennials says. No, I want to tell you what God says.

Here’s why—because God is good. The reason you should believe whatever you’re about to learn is because God is good and what you’re about to read comes from him. If God is the Good Samaritan, who isn’t deterred by our differences, by our sin, then he is good. If the God we meet in the Bible is the One who doesn’t count our sins against us, who forgives us for the sins we try to hide, who is happy with us despite all the moral reasons we are disappointed in ourselves, then God is good. If Jesus gave up his life on a cross for you when everyone else gave up on you, then God is good. The reason I want to look at some

Bible passages is because they're from the same book that tells me about that cross. I believe the passages are good because the God who wrote them is too.

Let's look at what God says by going back to his Word. In Genesis 19, Leviticus 18, Leviticus 20, 1 Corinthians 6, 1 Timothy 1, and Romans 1, God appears to address same-sex behavior. What does he say?

Let's start with Genesis 19, the story of Sodom. Do you know it? Sodom stinks. God says its stench wafts up to heaven and turns his stomach. God sends angels-in-disguise to investigate. A man named Lot welcomes them into his home, but that's when the men of Sodom pound on the door. "Where are those men?!" they demand. "Bring them out so we can have sex with them." When they try to break down the door, the angels step forward, strike the sex-crazed mob blind, and rush Lot's family out of Sodom just as fire falls from heaven and destroys them all. And if you grew up in church, that's all the proof you need. God burns up gays. Case closed, right?

Not exactly. Type "Sodom" into a Bible search engine, and you might be surprised. For example, Ezekiel 16:49, **"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy."** Arrogance. Pride. Selfishness. Jesus' brother says in Jude 1:7, **"Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion,"** but I'd call gang rape immoral and perverted, wouldn't you? So did God destroy Sodom because its men were arrogant, proud, selfish, and perverted or because they were arrogant, proud, selfish, perverted, and gay? The answer: We don't know. In the case of Sodom, God doesn't say much about a marriage that is faithful, monogamous, and gay.

Leviticus 18 and 20 seem less cloudy. Leviticus 18:22 says, **"Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable."** Leviticus 20:13 says, **"If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them has done what is detestable."** Well, there you go. *Detestable* isn't a neutral adjective. But there's a slight hiccup. Do you know what it is? Leviticus 18:22 is found in the book of . . . Leviticus. And if there's one book in the Bible that we don't pay much attention to, it's Leviticus.

Jennifer Knapp said it best. When the Christian contemporary artist came out as a lesbian, she challenged, “The conservative evangelical uses what most people refer to as the ‘clobber verses’ to refer to this loving [same-sex] relationship as an abomination, while they’re eating shellfish.”<sup>3</sup> Knapp was quoting Leviticus 11, which prohibits eating at Red Lobster. But it’s not just that. Leviticus chapters 1–7 are about animal sacrifice, which we don’t do. Leviticus chapters 8–10 are about rules for priests, which we don’t keep. Chapter 11 is about unclean foods, which we ignore. Chapters 12–15 are about which infections and bodily fluids make you unclean, which you don’t even want to read about. Chapter 16 is about a holiday we don’t celebrate. Chapter 17 is about God’s issue with raw meat, which we ignore with every rare burger. But then we get to Leviticus 18 and say, “But this one, this passage about gay guys—that one still applies.”

It seems like we should just leave Leviticus in the Old Testament with those old rules. But wait. Remember last chapter where I mentioned that Jesus affirmed a quote about loving your neighbor? Remember where it came from? Yup. Leviticus 19:18. It’s there, along with do not lie, do not play favorites, and do not hate. We don’t want to throw those out too, do we?

You see the problem? How do we know which of these passages are for God’s people back then and which are for God’s people today? How do we pick and choose? Here’s the good news—we don’t. In the New Testament, God picks. God tells us which passages were for back then (like he did with shellfish) and which are for his followers today by repeating them in the New Testament. So is this passage repeated? Hold that thought.

Until . . . now. Now we move into New Testament territory, and that’s where we run into the most hotly debated Greek word of our time: *arsenokoitai*. The New Testament was originally written in Greek, and more ink has been spilled over the real meaning of this word because of these two passages. First Corinthians 6:9,10: **“Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor *arsenokoitai* nor *malakoi* nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”** God is saying, “Be careful! People will try to deceive you! But sin is sin, and sin is serious to me. You can’t accept any of this, live in this, be proud of this, love this, and yet claim to love me. You

won't inherit the kingdom of God." First Timothy 1:9,10 makes the same point: **"We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for *arsenokoitai*, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine."** Who is living contrary to God's will? Liars and murderers and the sexually immoral and *arsenokoitai*.

So what in the world does that word mean? Bishop Gene Robinson, the first openly gay bishop in a major Christian denomination, writes, "The Greek word *arsenokoitai* is an even greater mystery. It is found nowhere else in Scripture. . . . We have nothing . . . to give us guidance as to its meaning. . . . Do we really want to base our condemnation of an entire group of people on a shaky translation of an unknowable Greek word? A reasonable person, not to mention a compassionate Christian, would not."<sup>4</sup> *Hmm* . . . what does that word mean? Well, Bishop Robinson is right. This exact word is only used in these two passages. But he's wrong in saying we have no guidance to its meaning because *arsenokoitai* is a Greek compound word. *Arsen* means "male." *Koitai* means "a man who sleeps with." Put the two words together and you have "a man who sleeps with a male."

While Robinson might call the translation shaky, the extreme majority of translators from all different denominations don't agree. The New International Version translates, "those who practice homosexuality." The English Standard Version, "men who practice homosexuality." The New American Standard Bible, "homosexuals." The Holman Christian Bible, "anyone practicing homosexuality." Dozens of other translations say exactly the same.

And that's not all. Remember those two passages from Leviticus? It turns out that the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek just before the New Testament was written. Guess what words the Greek writers used to translate Leviticus 18 and Leviticus 20? Yup. You shall not have sex with (*koiten*) a man (*arsen*). Paul put the words together in the New Testament and repeated the sexual ethics of the Old.

Roy is a Christian who deals with same-sex attraction every day. That's why I value his words on this particular word:

“Naturally, over the years, I’ve spent a lot of effort trying to discover a ‘spin’ on these passages which would enable me to embrace a gay relationship. But each time I’ve tried to do so, I’ve found that my conscience clobbers my pro-gay arguments. . . . Having studied Greek, it seems to me fairly self-evident that *arsenokoitai* is a compound word referring to those offenders condemned in Leviticus 18:22. . . . Suppose I have an Old Testament text which says, ‘it is unlawful to lay bricks,’ and I have a New Testament text that says, ‘bricklayers are lawbreakers.’ It would seem inconceivable to me to say that ‘Greek scholars don’t know exactly what *bricklayer* means.’”

See his point? The wording of 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 helps us see that homosexuality is not God’s will for our sexuality.

That leaves us with Romans 1:25-27. Look at Paul’s words: **“They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.”**

In the final weeks of the Bible 101 class that I teach at my church, I read this paragraph to people from all different spiritual backgrounds and then I ask, “What is that saying?” While it’s offensive to some and challenging to us all, I’ve only ever gotten one answer: “God doesn’t like it.”

I’m not sure about Sodom, but the rest of Scripture is clear. It’s the reason why Christians for thousands of years have not doubted this, questioned this, or denied this.

I know, there’s so much I haven’t told you. I haven’t taught you the context of these passages. I haven’t addressed why Romans 1 isn’t about abusive older men having sex with boys or why Leviticus isn’t about raping conquered armies. I haven’t addressed every scholarly objection from LGBTQ+ supporters. If you want to dig further with me, I’d love to, but now you know what I believe and why I believe it.

Two weeks ago I was talking with a young gay man. He was



humble and kind and generous to me. I talked about the church's failure to love, about Christian homophobia, about my sin against LGBTQ+ people, and about my failures as a pastor. But at the end of the conversation, he asked me, "What about you? Where do you stand?" I said, "I've studied this more than anything I've ever studied, and I can't get around it. I can't get around the passages. On this issue, I can't say God is okay with it."

I know. I know. I haven't said everything that needs to be said just yet, and that might confuse or frustrate you. I know I haven't addressed the sins Christians commit against LGBTQ+ people. I haven't addressed the objections either, objections like this: Didn't God make some people gay? Are you saying gay people can't be God's people? Didn't Jesus say not to judge? Aren't you a sinner too?

That's why you have to keep reading this book. I will get there, but for now, I want to remind you of what I already told you. God is good. Do you know why I know that? Because of Leviticus. Have you read Leviticus 16? It's about this old odd ritual where a priest would confess his sins on the head of a goat and then send it off into the wilderness. God put people's sins on a goat. Isn't God good?! But that was meant to be a picture of Jesus. Did you know Jesus took your sins away? The big ones, the ugly ones, the shameful ones, the sexual ones, the things I wouldn't dare to write down here. Do you know what he does? He takes them as far away from you as the east is from the west. God is good!

In 1 Corinthians 6:10,11 God says *arsenokoitai* and drunks and greedy people can't inherit his kingdom. Ever been drunk? Ever had a budget that had nothing to do with God? Me too. But in the very next verse, Paul says, "**But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ**" (verse 11). Jesus got rid of our greed. He sanctified us from our sexual sin. God is good!

In 1 Timothy 1:9,10 God says that *arsenokoitai* and liars are living contrary to God. Ever lied? Me too. But five verses later, Paul writes, "**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst**" (verse 15). What a verse! I am the worst sinner I know. The worst. But I am the kind of person Jesus came to save, and you are too. Turn to him, and there is nothing you have ever done that will get in the way of

you and God. God is so good!

Don't forget Romans 6. We all worship created things instead of God. We love a relationship, a job, an opinion, a feeling more than God every single day. But listen to where Romans goes: **"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (verse 23)! Sinners deserve to be separated from God, to die spiritually, but God has a gift—eternal life in Jesus. It's for sinners because sinners are all that there are! God is so good!

I don't know how God's passages are challenging you today, but I do know this: Whatever you've done, God is good. His greatest joy would be for you to turn to him and find out why, because no one will ever love you like this God. No one will ever be faithful to you like this God. No one will ever bring you more joy, more comfort, more friendship, more affection, more hope, more peace, more life than the God who says, "You've sinned, but I won't let that stop my love." If these passages point out your sin, let me point you to the God who loves sinners, even the worst of them.

If you already knew all this, if this confirms what you already believed about sexual morality, I need you to read this. I need you to remember these letters as you share this message—*LGBT*. Every letter matters, and the order of the letters matters even more.

The *L* stands for *Love*. It's the one and only place to start. Love LGBTQ+ people. Laugh with lesbians. Serve all sexual orientations. Be the guy who loves gay people. Love your neighbors. All of them. You're not allowed to even mention Leviticus until you've truly loved.

The *G* stands for *Gospel*. It's the passage you need to start with. Remember how I started with how good God is? Show LGBTQ+ people why you love God, why you love the Bible, why you are willing to turn from anything that gets in the way of knowing and experiencing God's love. Help them see the God who is better than anyone and anything.

The *B* stands for *Bible*. This is the tough part. It's what I covered in this chapter, but it's not the place to start. You shouldn't post this on Facebook. You shouldn't publicly share your views on gay marriage. You shouldn't try to convince gay non-Christians to stop living like they are. There's a time, after lots and lots of love

and lots and lots of gospel, when you can talk to LGBTQ+ friends who profess Christianity about biblical sexuality.

The *T* stands for *Trust*. Trust the Holy Spirit no matter if your gay brother says thank you or hates you or if people repent or reject you. I know some of you are ready to put this book down and never pick it up again. You hate this. You're disgusted with me. I thought of you as I wrote, but I trust it's never wrong to tell you about following God. Yes, the cross is heavy. Yes, you have to deny yourself. But this is the only place to find grace, to find undeserved, unstoppable love. I trust this was not a mistake.

LGBT. Love first. Gospel next. The Bible follows. And trust it works. That's what Christians need to do with what you've learned in this chapter.

That's what changed Rosaria. As a lesbian professor at Syracuse, Rosaria Champagne hated how Christians hated. She knew what Christians were like from the protests and the threatening letters she received, but then she met Pastor Ken and his wife, Floy. Ken invited Rosaria over for one of Floy's home-cooked meals and listened. They loved. It wasn't a gimmick or a bait-and-switch. It was just love, and then Ken prayed. Rosaria wrote, "I had never heard anyone pray to God as if God cared, as if God listened. . . . I felt as though I was treading on something real, something sincere, something important, something transparent. . . . Ken's God seemed alive." Ken prayed to God as his Father, because Jesus made Ken God's son. That's the gospel. For the next two years, Ken opened the Bible. As Rosaria wrestled with her sin and God's grace, a war raged in her heart. Another pastor assured her she could honor God by living an honorable lesbian life. "He told me that I could have Jesus and my lesbian lover," Rosaria wrote. "This was a very appealing prospect. But I had been reading and rereading Scripture, and there are no such marks of postmodern 'both/and.'" That's the Bible. Then it happened. Here's how Rosaria describes it: "That morning I emerged from the bed of my lesbian lover and an hour later was sitting in a pew. . . . You never know the terrain someone else has walked to come worship the Lord. . . . Two incommensurable worldviews clashed together: the reality of my lived experience and the truth of the word of God. . . . In this crucible of confusion, I learned something important. I learned the first rule of repentance: that repentance requires greater intimacy with God than

with our sin. . . . And sometimes we all have to crawl there on our hands and knees”<sup>5</sup> Rosaria did. Because of Ken and Floy’s love and the gospel and the Bible and the trustworthy work of the Spirit, she came just as she was, and Jesus accepted her that way.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Based on this chapter and its study of the “6 key passages” on homosexuality, how would you try to convince another person that homosexuality is a sin like any other sin, no more and no less?
2. Before this chapter, what did you believe about the morality of homosexuality? Why did you believe that?
3. After this chapter, what do you believe about the morality of homosexuality? Why do you believe that?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. What should a Christian who has never felt same-sex attraction remember about these words? What should a Christian who feels same-sex attraction remember about these words?
5. Reread the first chapter of this book so you don’t forget to love every person and every passage as much as God does. Write a prayer for help to do this.
6. Why start the discussion about what the Bible says with the statement: “God is good”?
7. Respond to the following statements based on God’s Word:

*“Homosexuality is the worst sin of all!”*

*“God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because its inhabitants were gay and proud of it.”*

*“The Bible passages about homosexuality are too confusing to come to any official conclusions.”*

*“If you eat shrimp, you shouldn’t call homosexuality a sin because Leviticus condemns eating shellfish too!”*

8. Fill in these blanks. Why is the order of these words so important?

L\_\_\_\_\_ G\_\_\_\_\_ B\_\_\_\_\_ T\_\_\_\_\_

9. Our Lord is called “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3). Why is that truth beautiful for those of us who feel the pull of same-sex attraction?

## BUT WHAT ABOUT . . . ?

The online article about gay and God was short, but the comments below were not. “God created me gay. I’m living God’s will by being who he created me to be.” “In the church we are taught to make our sins feel lighter by judging. . . . but love and acceptance is what Jesus preached.” “I [am gay but I] still have faith and I will . . . get to heaven.”

Those comments raise some good questions. Are LGBTQ+ people born that way? Does God make people gay? Are Christians judging when Jesus said not to? Can LGBTQ+ people go to heaven? So far in this book, God has taught us to love people, all people, despite their differences. God has taught us to love passages, all the passages, despite their difficulty. But those two foundational points don’t answer all of our questions. So what about . . . ?

That’s what I want to cover in this chapter: four of the biggest questions about being gay and following God. Here’s the passage God wants to guide us with: **“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding”** (Proverbs 3:5). Whenever we talk about something controversial, it’s essential to trust that the God who is righteous is also right about this. So with all your heart, trust him. Wherever the passages lead you, trust him. Even if culture or the church or you disagree, trust him because this is the Lord. This is the Good Samaritan God who doesn’t let our sin stop his love. This is the God who loves you before you get better, before you fix yourself, before your sexuality is on the straight and narrow. There is no one like the Lord. With that trust, let’s answer some tough questions.

Our first question is a game changer: Are you born gay? The great 21<sup>st</sup>-century theologian Lady Gaga sings that God doesn’t make mistakes. She was born the way she is. The logic seems solid. If we don’t choose our sexual orientation, then it’s how we were made. And if God made us, then God makes people gay. If God always does what’s right, then acting on your orientation can’t be wrong.

But have you ever witnessed an aisle 4 meltdown? A three-year-old wants the squeaky toy in aisle 4. Mom says, “Not today, Sweetie.” That’s when it happens. Shouting, screaming, writhing, whining, drooling on the store’s tile floor. Where did

the kid learn that? Did Mom model that behavior? Where did it come from? God's answer: The kid was . . . born that way.

The passage says it like this: **“Surely I was sinful at birth”** (Psalm 51:5). The apostle Paul added, **“I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature”** (Romans 7:18). Nature. Sure, you can be nurtured, or taught, to sin. But you and I were already naughty by nature. Because of sin, we are born that way.

That includes our sexuality. Did you know that I am a natural-born polygamist? Don't panic. I love my wife. I haven't cheated on her. The truth is when a commercial comes on showing models in their underwear, I have to force myself to look away. I also have to fight the natural desire that 98% of men feel to lust after countless women, wedding ring be damned. I was born that way. When two teenagers are dating, they have to fight the natural desire to steal God's wedding gift of sex because they were born that way. When a wife feels lonely and her old boyfriend reaches out through Facebook with some old memories and some new feelings, she has to put that desire to death because she was born that way. Our natural emotions and reactions and inclinations and desires and orientations are very natural. Eye for eye and tooth for tooth revenge is very natural, but that doesn't make it biblical.

I hope that fact raises your compassion. I hope that truth doesn't become your weapon but your reason to sympathize with LGBTQ+ people. Don't make the mistake he did. A few years ago, a well-meaning Christian man said something that made me want to hide under a pew. Our church invited a guest speaker to talk about his struggle with same-sex desires. The speaker was honest and vulnerable. He admitted that despite all the attempts, he couldn't pray the gay away. That's when the older Christian raised his hand. “How can you feel that way?” he yucked. “I can't imagine feeling that way about another man.” There was little compassion in his voice because he forgot that our desires are not always our choice. Many Christians battle same-sex attraction with unwanted desires. They're in a war they didn't choose to enlist in. They need a band of brothers, a squad of sisters, fellow Christians to fight by their side, to carry them when they're wounded, and to love them despite the difference in their desires.

I don't know if science will ever discover a gay gene, but I do know this: Our bodies, our brains, our sexuality, our souls were affected by the fall into sin. God made a masterpiece when he made our race, but sin scribbled on God's *Mona Lisa*. We are born in sin and need to be born again. So that means our natural passions don't determine right or wrong. Only God's passages can do that.

That brings us to question 2: We keep talking about this being a sin and that being a sin and don't do this and you can't live like that, but didn't Jesus say, "Don't judge!"? Being judgmental isn't very Christian, is it? Aren't we all sinners? What right does one sinner have to judge another? Wasn't rapper Tupac right when he rapped, "Only God can judge me"?

That's a great question, and it might be right. Jesus did say, **"Do not judge, or you too will be judged."** But let's look at what Jesus said in context. Matthew 7:1-5 says, **"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."** Jesus is worried about that plank. He's worried Christians will try to pick at the sins in others and pay no attention to the sins in themselves. That's hypocrisy! But notice what he says at the end. First, start with your plank, and then remove their speck. Catch that? Should Christians pick the specks out of other people's lives? Should Christians judge? Specifically, should Christians tell LGBTQ+ people what we learned in the last chapter of this book? The answer is . . . maybe. It depends on who you are and who they are.

If they're not Christians, you should not judge. Let me repeat that. Christ did not tell Christians to judge the world. Let me repeat that again. Jesus did not tell his disciples to tell people who aren't his disciples to start acting like disciples. Listen to Paul's words: **"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside"** (1 Corinthians 5:12,13).



What business is it of ours to judge non-Christians for their lifestyles, sexuality, definitions of marriage, sin? Answer: It is none of our business. It's why Jesus says to take the speck from your "brother's eye." A "brother" means a fellow son of God the Father, a fellow Christian. If he's not a brother, it's not your business to judge. So be careful what you post for the world to see. You're not being bold when you stand up for God's law on social media. Social media is the world. This is the church. Judge non-Christian behavior in the Christian church. If they're not Christians, what business is it of yours to judge? Answer: It's none of your business.

So does that mean we should stick to judging other Christians? Well . . . maybe. Even if they are Christians and there's a plank in your eye, you should not judge. If there's a sin you aren't taking seriously, aren't repenting of, aren't going to war against, you shouldn't say a word about anyone else.

When my classmate wrote a blog about this topic, one of the comments killed me. A woman wrote, "I went to college with you, and I saw what you and your friends did. You all got drunk and didn't seem too sorry about it. But you made sure everyone knew how bad it was to be gay." I wish she wasn't right, but lots of us got drunk in college, and we didn't have some grand plan of repentance. But Jesus would have told us, "Don't you dare judge. Until you take care of you, don't say a word about them." Because Jesus didn't want plank-faced Christians to pick at the speck in a bisexual's bed.

You shouldn't either. If you aren't fighting your selfishness in marriage, your impatience with the kids, your critical tongue, your disrespect of our president, your game-day buzz, your selfish ambition, your social media addiction, your selective love, your unspoken racism, your grudge with your ex; if you aren't taking your sin seriously, you have nothing to say about theirs. Nothing.

But, there is a third category. If you yourself are a repentant Christian, not perfect, but you're sorry and you're trying to change, then you should humbly, gently, lovingly judge someone who is LGBTQ+ and who professes Jesus and loves the Bible. Jesus says, **"First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye"** (Matthew 7:5). In other words, repentant Christians should

judge. We should judge ourselves, and we should judge one another. We should open a Bible and talk with our sister who came out, our friend from Bible study, our bisexual son who says he's saved. A speck in your eye can cause you to crash on the highway to God, so repentant Christians should point out that speck and help remove it in Christ's name.

Question 3—Can you be a gay Christian? Can LGBTQ+ people be saved? Now there's a complicated question, so let me start with a simple story. It was my daughter's birthday. She came home from school with bags of sugar, birthday snacks, and gifts from her teacher piled in her arms. Then she rushed to the mailbox and found a birthday package of cool socks. "Daddy, I want to carry them!" she insisted, piling the socks on top of the gifts on top of the snacks on top of the sugar, and then she ran to the house to enjoy the gifts. Suddenly she paused. She looked at the doorknob. Her hands were heaping with things she loved, but unless she set them down, she couldn't get inside.

Christianity is like that. There's something you can't hold on to and end up inside God's house, a part of his family. Do you know what that something is? It's not sin. Sin doesn't keep you out of heaven. If it did, none of us would get inside! It's not sexual sin. Sexual sin doesn't keep you out of heaven. If it did, none of us would get inside! It's not same-sex sin. Same-sex sin doesn't keep you out of heaven. Not the desire. Not even the behavior. No, there is one and only one thing that keeps you outside of heaven—a hard heart.

Here's what God says: **"Blessed is the one who always trembles before God, but whoever hardens their heart falls into trouble"** (Proverbs 28:14). And **"if we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left"** (Hebrews 10:26). And **"no one who is born of God will continue to sin"** (1 John 3:9). If you keep intentionally sinning, you can't get inside, no matter what you think. If you know the passage and don't tremble before it, you harden your heart, you fill up your hands with sin, you tell God, "I don't care what the passage says; I'm not letting this go," then you can't get inside. There aren't "Seven Deadly Sins"; there's only one. The one you're not sorry for.

Let me be clear. If you care about your sin, you're in! The struggle, the desire to follow the passage, the sorrow you feel

when you act, when you kiss, when you hook up, that does not kick you out of the kingdom. No! The fact that it bothers you means your spiritual heart is still beating. It's not hardened by sin. It's filled with the Holy Spirit. Can you be drawn to any sin, commit any sin, be of any sexual orientation and be saved? Yes. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and will purify us from all unrighteousness!

However, if you don't battle sin, any sin, this sin, you can't get in. If you won't let go of the relationship, of the lifestyle, of the opinion, not even for God, you're locking yourself out. I couldn't possibly claim to love you if I didn't tell you that. I know accepting that lifestyle brings all sorts of good things into your life: companionship, love, self-acceptance, an armful of good things. But there is something, Someone so much better, and I don't want your hands to be so full that you don't get to see him face-to-face, because he so wants to see you.

I'm not God. I don't know which LGBTQ+ people know the truth and which don't. I don't know if your gay friend knows and is hardening his heart or if he's confused by the interpretations he reads online. I don't know if she's ignorant of the passages or unrepentant in the face of them. God will be the final judge of our hearts. Our job is simply to love every person and love every passage, even the passages that tell us to repent.

That brings us to our final question—Why this? Why now? How did sexual orientation become the issue, the one that divides families, churches, denominations? Why didn't Christians debate this for thousands of years until now? I think I stumbled upon that answer when I interviewed a gay pastor from Wisconsin.

Pastor Allen and I had an amazing talk about being gay and following God. My heart broke when he told me the story of being blackmailed into coming out by a member of his own church. (How's that for loving people?) He helped me understand how Christians hurt LGBTQ+ people and don't even know it. I definitely didn't want to do that. So I said, "Allen, if you were in our church, what would you think if I said this—'We all struggle with sin. With impurity, worry, impatience, homosexuality. You do. I do too. But we can struggle together. Jesus forgives us, and we can walk together and fight temptation as the family of God.'" I thought it was humble, grace-filled, community-minded, and hopeful, not hypocritical. But Allen

didn't agree. He said, "You are attacking the core of my being."

That's when it hit me. He believes his sexuality is the core of his being. To say it's wrong is to say he's wrong. To call it sin is to take away his very identity, and I think that's it. The real issue is not sexuality; it's identity. In our culture, the greatest value is to be you. Be true to yourself, we preach. Live your truth. Embrace who you are. Love yourself. Never be afraid to be yourself. March to the beat of your own drum. That's your true identity.

This is why we struggle. One day we realize we're gay. We have these desires or someone we love comes out. Desiring another woman is who she is. Culture has taught us to say, "Be yourself. Be true to you." Jesus said, "Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Lose your life and follow me, and you will find a life that's even better." That's hard to say because the last thing in the world we want to do is to attack anyone's identity.

But Pastor Allen was wrong. The core of our being is not our sexuality. No, the core of a Christian's being is Christ. This passage says it best: "**Christ . . . is your life**" (Colossians 3:4). Jesus Christ is the core of my being. Nothing else. He is all I need. I can deny that desire, the one Jesus says is sin, and I still have my identity. I still have a relationship status—a redeemed child of God. I still have a family—brothers and sisters in the faith and a perfect Father in heaven. I still have a community—countless Christians who are denying their sinful natures and finding perfection in Jesus Christ. The psalmist said, "**Earth has nothing I desire besides you**" (73:25). In Jesus we find something better than our truth. We find the Truth. We find a new identity. One that no one can take away.

Ethan, a young man who had left the church to embrace the gay lifestyle, once presented to a group of pastors. He told his story of walking away from the passages in an attempt to be true to himself before coming back in repentance, and he admitted that he didn't suddenly love women. He fought the sinful nature inside him. One of the pastors asked, "So, what do you consider yourself? Gay? Ex-gay?" Ethan paused, "Well, I don't really like labels, but I guess if I had to choose one, I'd pick 'redeemed child of God.'" Yes. His identity was not the sexuality. It was Jesus. And if Jesus is your identity, he can take anything and you'll still have everything.

Are you born gay? Should Christians judge? Can LGBTQ+ people be saved? Why this? Why now? These are tough questions, and God's answers are not always easy to swallow. That's why I need to tell you one last story.

A few years back, a Christian preacher became an instant success. After only a year or two, thousands of people showed up, but then he preached *that* sermon. The passage that made the people angry. Some were confused. Most were offended, and almost everyone left. Not one or two families, but thousands of people left. The preacher watched his mega-church dwindle down to a small group because of a single sermon. So with a sad heart, he asked the few who remained, "Do you want to leave too?" One member of the church named Pete said, "Where are we going to go? You have the words of eternal life." Do you know the name of that pastor? Jesus. Jesus preached some hard things, but those who didn't lean on their own understanding trusted him and found the words of eternal life.

I know this is hard. I know there are churches where preachers will tell you to protect America and judge the culture. I know there are churches where you won't be told to deny yourself and take up your cross. But where else will we go? What other book will tell us about a God who is so good to love sinners like us? What message gives so much hope to people who've messed it all up? What Lord would love enough to give his own Son for you? So let's deal with the tough questions, trusting in the Lord with all our hearts.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Agree/Disagree: Christians who daily battle pride, jealousy, and perverted thoughts should define themselves with these words: *I am a proud man. I am a jealous woman. I am a worrier.*
2. What have you found challenging about this teaching so far? How does Proverbs 3:5 help calm your fears as you work through those challenges?
3. As you think back to your experiences, have you been a "good judge" as Jesus described in Matthew 7:1-6? Why or why not? What will be different about your judging in the future?

4. Name three reasons why finding your identity, value, and purpose in Jesus Christ is essential for embracing God's truth about sexuality. Use Psalm 73:25 for help if needed.
5. Respond to the following statement based on God's Word:  
*"There is no hope for you if you are attracted to your own sex."*

## AND!

Sometimes pastors do dumb things. Like Andy. When his church remodeled their worship space, Andy snuck in after hours to check the progress. That's when he saw the I-beam—an 18-inch steel beam stretched from corner to corner of the construction, 20 feet off the ground. Andy thought, "I want to walk across that!" Like I said, sometimes pastors do dumb things. Minutes later, Andy was tiptoeing his way across the steel beam, 20 feet closer to heaven (and one step away from it!). Halfway across, he panicked. He realized what was at stake if he stepped too far left or too far right. If Andy didn't take the exact right step, the result would be disaster.

I think lots of you have felt like that as you've read this book. I don't think writing *Gay & God* was a dumb idea, but without a doubt it has been a biblical balancing act, a balance between loving all the people in this world and loving all the passages in God's Word. God has taught us to love people. All people. Different people. L and G and B and T people. Different should never deter a Christian's love, but step too far in the direction of people, and it's easy to fall away from the passages. The passages God wrote. The passages about sexual morality. The passages about repentance. The passages about judging correctly. Step too far in the direction of a few passages, and it's easy to step away from loving people.

How's your balance? If I asked your gay friends about you, what would they say? Would they talk about your love of people, your kindness, your hospitality, your willingness to stand up to those who hate? Or would they talk about your love of passages, the passages you shared about being gay and following God? What are you known for: standing up for people OR standing up for passages? Which is easier for you: refusing to let go of your love for LGBTQ+ people OR refusing to let go of your love for God's inspired passages? Most Christians are "OR" people, but too much is at stake to stay that way.

If you're anything like me, you've been living an OR life for far too long. You've been quoting passages forever, but you haven't befriended a gay person . . . ever. LGBTQ+ people have little evidence you actually love them. Yet if you don't love all people, you don't really love all the passages. Perhaps

you've been loving LGBTQ+ people, but you've drifted from the passages. You've been quoting Lady Gaga, but not our Lord God. You've focused so much on not offending those you can see that you've offended the One you can't. You've been so concerned about acceptance that you've forgotten about eternity. But if you don't love all the passages, you don't really love people, because God wrote the passages out of love for people! Oh, it's dangerous to be an OR person.

Don't you wish we could see how Jesus did it? Don't you wish there was a time when Jesus had to choose between loving a person and loving a passage so we could see what all this looks like in real life? Guess what. There is an example! One day, Jesus' enemies forced him to choose. Here's what happened . . .

After 30 years of carpentry, Jesus claims to be the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Son of God. That is controversial enough, but he also loves people, all people. Every prostitute in town knows Jesus doesn't want their bodies, but he does want their hearts. Every drunk has seen Jesus at a party or six, because he is friends with the kind of people who get drunk. And that's what makes the conservatives mad. What about the passages? What about the passages about purity and sobriety and obedience? How can you be the Son of God if you ignore all the passages just to love all those people?

They get their chance to expose Jesus because they catch "her," one of "those people," a married woman found in another man's bed, an adulteress, a woman who forgot the passages about sexual purity, about monogamy, about the definition of marriage. Listen to what happens: **"At dawn [Jesus] appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him"** (John 8:1-6). This isn't hypothetical. This is an actual person. And the passage says the wages of her sin is death. Leviticus 20:10 says, **"If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress**



**are to be put to death.”** That’s not some conservative Jewish tradition. That’s a passage from God given to the government of Old Testament Israel. Government today is different in many ways, but in those days, God’s will was clear. So, Jesus, what do you say? Do you agree with God? Do you love God’s passage or will you love this sinful person (again)?

Oh snap! WWJC? Which will Jesus choose? If Jesus says to the sinner, “I love you just as you are,” what about marriage and right and wrong and the countless passages where God says, “I don’t approve of that!”? If Jesus says, “Well, if the passage says kill her . . .” What about her? What about love and mercy and compassion and forgiveness? What about this person, this actual person, whom God loves?

Which will Jesus choose? There’s no way not to fall off the beam to one side or the other. So Jesus decides to play Pictionary. **“But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger”** (John 8:6). Jesus starts to sketch. The Greek verb “to write” is used, at times, to refer to writing down an accusation. Is that what Jesus is writing? Is he drawing lines in the sand, stick figures with trembling hearts that worry, tiny hearts that have no compassion, green hearts that envy? I don’t know, but Jesus doesn’t speak; he just draws.

Then he says it—the passage so profound you’ve heard it even if you never go to church. The famous words you’ve memorized even if you don’t know any others. Verses 7 and 8 say, **“When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.”** You guys want to kill her? Okay. If you’ve never stumbled, fire away. If you’ve never ignored a passage, send a split-fingered fastball into her face. If you’ve never sinned, throw the first stone. **“At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No one, sir,’ she said”** (verses 9-11). The men leave. The older ones have more sins to remember. Their stones drop lifelessly next to their sandals. Even the most forgetful Pharisees remember a sin or two. They all leave. They all admit they are passage breakers, sinners just like her.

But the tension isn't over because guess who's still there? Jesus. Guess what Jesus has never committed? Sin. So guess what Jesus has every right to do? Throw the first stone. What will Jesus choose? Now that the conservative hypocrites are gone, now that it's just Jesus, the friend of sinners, the supposed Son of God, what will he say? Will he defend the person or the passage? You don't want to miss it because Jesus summarizes my whole book in 14 words. Ready for it? Ready?

**“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin’**” (verse 11). Wow. “I don't condemn you.” Because you're a good person? Because you fixed what you broke? Because you've proven you've changed? No. “I don't condemn you because I forgive you,” Jesus says. Because God is full of mercy and compassion. Because there is nothing we can confess that God will not forgive. Jesus says something so shocking you think he has totally forgotten about the passage from Leviticus. He says, “Go. I'm not going to kill you. I'm not going to condemn you. I'm going to forgive you because I love people like you. Go now in peace because I love you.”

That's why I love rainbows. No, this is not a tangent. Do you know why they call that thing a rainbow? Because it appears after it rains and because it looks like a . . . bow. Oh. What's a bow? A bow is a weapon. It's something that fires an arrow at your enemy or your 12-point buck. Huh. God made the beams of sunlight travel through water droplets and separate into colors so that a weapon appears in the sky. Kind of weird . . . but have you ever noticed which way God's bow is pointing? Up! If OR people like me and you are down here, shouldn't the bow be pointing down? Shouldn't God be in the sky threatening to fire away on people who don't love people and people who don't love passages? Why would God point the symbol of his anger up at himself?

In his crazy love for people, God took the punishment for our sin. The passages of God's law said sinners deserve to die—the wages of sin is death. But God wrote other passages, passages about a Messiah, a substitute, a Savior who would pay the price, die for our sin. That's why Jesus could tell a marriage-wrecking woman, “I don't condemn you.” Not because adultery didn't deserve condemnation, but because Jesus would go on to be condemned in her place. Jesus did the same for you. If you've been a judgmental accuser or a Scripture-twisting excuser, Jesus

was condemned for you. One passage says, **“Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God”** (1 Peter 3:18). Every rainbow reminds us of this! The rainbow is not a symbol for the gay community. It’s a symbol of Christianity. It’s a reminder that the anger God should have felt toward OR people was shot up at the cross so Jesus can smile and say, “I don’t condemn you.” It’s why I can tell my congregation at the end of a church service, “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you.” His face shines. God smiles. “I don’t condemn you. Go now in peace!”

*AND*. Highlight that word. Underline it. Make a circle of glue around it and drop a pound of glitter on it. Jesus said to the woman, **“I don’t condemn you.”** *AND* **“Leave your life of sin.”** “I love you and stop sinning. I love you and leave that life. I love you and you’re ignoring the passages I love. I love you and stop. I love you just as you are and don’t stay that way.”

WWJC? Which will Jesus choose? Passages or people? Jesus’ answer is *AND*. Christ loved people *AND* passages. Does Jesus love people in such shocking ways that conservatives have always questioned his values? Yes. *AND* does Jesus love passages in such shocking ways that liberals question his compassion? Yes. Does Jesus love people, different people, people who don’t seem to fit in most church circles? Yes. *AND* does Jesus love passages, tough passages, convicting passages—you were born in sin, so deny yourself and follow me passages? Yes. So, Jesus, should we love people, all people, of every sexual orientation? “Yes, *AND* you should love the passage. All the passages. About every sexual orientation.” Jesus, shouldn’t we stand up for the passages? “Yes. *AND* you should stand up for the people. Every last one because God loves them too.” Christ wants Christians to love people *AND* passages.

When it comes to gay and God, there are a thousand steps too far to the right that will kill people. Embrace the classic, conservative position and you will kill compassion and gentleness and biblical love. There are a thousand steps too far to the left that will kill people. Embrace the modern position and you will kill the trustworthiness of God’s Word and repentance and eternities. So there is only one step, one very, very narrow step to keep us all safe. You must avoid that side *AND* that side because so much is at stake.

AND. We can't change what we did, but we can choose what we'll do. With the Holy Spirit's power, we can be AND people. We can be the neighbors who invite the gay couple over for dinner AND eventually tell them about a God so good we would give up anything for him. We can be the students who say, "Amen!" to this sermon AND make sure "That's gay!" is expelled from our schools. We can be the church family who humbly confesses our sexual sins AND gently judges our Christian brother's sexuality. We can be the church who loves it when lesbians walk through our doors so we can show them love AND share the light of God's Word. We can be the Christians who confess our same-sex desires only to find unconditional love AND prayers for our hearts to change. We can be the kind of Christians who confuse 98% of the church because we don't fit in their either/or world. We are against sin AND we are for people, and we learned it from the Son of God himself.

When we fall (and we will), when our steps aren't on God's straight and narrow, remember Jesus' first word to that woman. That's what we need to change. That's what changed Josh. Despite being a Christian, Josh's marriage wasn't so Christian. One night, seven years in, it hit bottom. Josh was frustrated with his wife, and he told her how selfish and self-absorbed she was. While she sat in the living room, he stood in the kitchen, yelling his accusations, wanting to wound her with the venom spewing out of his mouth. That's when it happened. Josh wrote, "I'll never forget: Andrea came around the corner. I was steeling myself for whatever she'd throw back at me and getting ready to fight. But she just came up and pulled me really close to her, and she began sobbing. She cried and cried and cried as she held me. She said, 'I don't know what happened to you, but I am not going anywhere.'" Josh confessed, "Those were maybe the most powerful words I'd heard in our relationship. I was at my absolute worst . . . [and she said] 'I'm not going anywhere.'"

I don't know what sin you've committed today. I don't know what people or passages you've ignored, but I do know this: We have a God who makes the best promises to the worst people. We have a God who says, "I'm not going anywhere. I don't condemn you." And nothing makes us want to leave our lives of sin like that.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How would you respond to the following objections?

*“But Paul didn’t know what we know about homosexuality, so he couldn’t speak about our situation.”*

*“But Jesus loved the outcast and accepted those his society rejected. He surely would accept the bullied, excluded, and rejected gay community of our time.”*

*“How could God condemn his own creation? If you are born gay, God must have wanted it that way.”*

*“If you march in a gay pride parade, you certainly cannot be saved since you are not repentant.”*

2. Read John’s description of Jesus in John 1:14. How is the phrase “full of grace and truth” a preview of what Jesus would model in John 8:1-11?
3. Share at least two ways this book has changed your perspective on homosexuality and Christianity.
4. Check out 1 Peter 3:13-18 and make three connections between Peter’s words and this book.
5. How can you be an “AND” person? List some specific things that you can work on.
6. The apostle Paul promised, “Where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (Romans 5:20). For everyone who struggles to say no to sin, sexual or otherwise, why are these words life-giving to the soul?

## **PEOPLE OR PASSAGES?**

Followers of Jesus have tried to maintain a biblical balance since the Christian church began. It has never been easy, especially in the area of sexuality and family. As Christians, we ask God's forgiveness for our missteps and flaws in both our beliefs and our behavior.

May God send his Holy Spirit into our hearts that every member of God's family would love what God loves, love who God loves, and love how God loves until the King of Love calls us home.

## ABOUT THE WRITER

**Pastor Mike Novotny** pours his Jesus-based joy into his ministry as a pastor at The CORE (Appleton, Wisconsin) and as the lead speaker for Time of Grace, a global media ministry that connects people to God through television, print, and digital resources. Unafraid to bring grace and truth to the toughest topics of our time, he has written numerous books, including *3 Words That Will Change Your Life*; *What's Big Starts Small*; *You Know God Loves You, Right?*; and *When Life Hurts*. Mike lives with his wife, Kim, and their two daughters, Brooklyn and Maya; runs long distances; and plays soccer with other middle-aged men whose best days are long behind them. To find more books by Pastor Mike, go to [timeofgrace.store](http://timeofgrace.store).

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Time of Grace is for people who are experiencing the highest of highs or have hit rock bottom or are anywhere in between. That's because through Time of Grace, you will be reminded that the One who can help you in your life, the God of forgiveness and grace and mercy, is not far away. He is right here with you. GOD is here! He will help you on your spiritual journey. Walk with us at [timeofgrace.org](http://timeofgrace.org).

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or by calling 800.661.3311. Thank you!

## NOTES

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